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ABSTRACT

The author reports on a semester-long study of British teacher centers, an examination that includes purposes, structure, and administration of the British models, and a comparison of these models to current efforts in the establishment and operation of teacher centers in the United States. From the research undertaken, it is concluded that: (1) the British "model" exists in reality only to the extent that British educators agree on the basic purposes of teacher centers; otherwise, generalization is not possible; (2) the British model gives more responsibility for inservice education to practicing teachers; (3) the British utilize teacher centers less for preservice work than U.S. centers, and they have little intention of using them as vehicles for certification. The body of the document elaborates on these three conclusions by describing: (1) basic purposes of British teacher centers; (2) curriculum development functions, their sources, and objectives; (3) differences between American perceptions of British teacher centers and the actual situations; and (4) characteristics of successful centers in Britain. It is noted that the opportunity for American education to emulate British successes and avoid British shortcomings in teacher center development depend to a large degree on America's understanding of both the similarities and differences in British and American concepts of the movement. (MJB)

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THE TEACHER CENTER: BRITISH AND AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

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The recent "Teacher Centers Program" enacted as part of the Education Amendments of 1976 provides for teacher centers to be planned and operated cooperatively by public school districts and institutions of higher education. The program is significant because it indicates a shift in emphasis in American teacher education toward inservice education and makes the schools themselves the focus and locale of teacher training. A further provision provides for public schools, and particularly classroom teachers, to assume the major responsibility for determining the kinds of training and other experiences needed by teachers.[1]

The Teacher Centers Program is deeply rooted in what many Americans perceive to be an extremely successful British teacher center prototype. Like their American counterparts, teacher centers in Britain have gained stature from the recognition that teacher training is grossly inadequate because it is based largely on an "overdependence upon initial (preservice) training..."[2] In the now famous James Report of 1972 (so named for its prestigious chairman, Lord James of Rusholme, British Secretary of State for Education) the British Department of Education and Science called for using the leadership and knowledge of practicing teachers in the professional training of inservice teachers and designated that local schools themselves were the proper place for such training to occur. This report had the impact of strengthening teacher centers which had been created in 1964 as curriculum development and dissemination centers for the Nuffield Mathematics Project, the British version of the new math.

Once established, the teacher center movement in the United Kingdom gained impetus from the belief that classroom teachers must be heavily involved in their own professional development and that this

development can best take place at a local level where teachers are taught by other teachers who are accessible to one another and who understand the problems of the schools in a specific locale. Importing this idea to America, however, will impact popular notions about teacher education significantly, especially in schools and colleges of education. Therefore, American educators both in university settings and in the public schools should undertake a critical examination of the purposes, structure and administration of the British prototype; and, more importantly, make a deliberate effort to study the impact British teacher centers have had on improving the quality of teacher education in the United Kingdom since their inception in 1964.

In the fall of 1977, I spent the better part of the semester in Britain studying teacher centers in an effort to compare their centers with current efforts to establish and operate teacher centers in the United States. Generally, my research brought me to the following conclusions:

1. The British "model" to which we defer with such great reverence exists in reality only to the extent that British educators agree on the basic purposes of teacher centers. Otherwise, British teacher centers do not lend themselves to generalization.

2. Adopting the British model in the United States will give more responsibility for inservice education to practicing teachers. The British have had success with this approach, but not to the extent that we usually assume.

3. The British <u>do not</u> use their teacher centers heavily for preservice work as our centers do and have little intention of using them as a vehicle for certification. The responsibility for preservice education

rests firmly with the university. Inservice is considered professional training after the undergraduate degree which is combined with a teaching qualification. As one British educator put it, "We cannot assume that attendance by individuals at courses, whoever is responsible, will necessarily bring direct benefit to their teaching. We must be especially careful of the loss of teacher autonomy that might result from orientating all inservice provision to administrator's perceptions of school and system needs."[3]

In short, the British notion about the individual responsibilities of the university and the public school in the process of teacher preparation differs considerably from our own. It is this difference which could prevent a complete transferability of the British model to the United States. The discussion which follows will elaborate on these conclusions and define a rationale for why American educators should exercise caution in implementing teacher center legislation.

The idea of teacher centers originated in Britain in 1964. They were established to disseminate curriculum materials developed by the Nuffield mathematics project. As the centers grew, they not only helped classroom teachers become familiar with the materials generated by this national curriculum project but also trained teachers in the use of "new math" concepts. It was reasoned that a center which was close to local schools and easily accessible to teachers would offer advantages over university based courses which involved a lengthy period of absence from school and which were sometimes so theoretical that they were not helpful and even unrealistic.

Today British centers serve three basic purposes: (1) Inservice training which will further the growth of fundamental knowledge relevant to

educational problems, (2) social gathering and interaction, and (3) curriculum development.

The curriculum development function is a particularly important one and is generated from three main bases in a local area: 1) National Curriculum projects, 2) colleges and universities, and 3) teachers themselves.

National development projects provide feedback to local teachers about which materials and which methods work best in actual classroom use. National projects (such as individually Prescribed Instruction in this country) are not intended to provide authorative national answers but rather provide a means for collating and feeding back knowledge about materials and methods in a systematic fashion which can be useful to practitioners.

Curriculum development in local teacher centers allows (a) teachers to define their objectives in teaching, (b) develop and test the effectiveness of methods and materials which will help achieve those objectives, (c) assess the effectiveness of their work in actual classrooms, and (d) inform other teachers about their relative success. Curriculum development at a local level, especially curriculum which is designed and tested by teachers themselves, theoretically has the effect of heightening the teacher's sense of professionalism. As teachers begin thinking out problems for themselves, they begin to take on the roles of researchers and clinical observers of children learning. Jean Piaget has pointed out that until teachers assume these roles they will continue to do what they do out of habit instead of conviction about the learning process:

> "The illusions that teachers have in front of classes of children are that they are making themselves understood and that they are understanding. These are two illusions that must be dissipated. If they are going to be at the level of psychological understanding which they need to be good teachers they must not only read about research but practice it."[4]

The point to be made is this: What Americans term the British "model" resides only in the agreed upon purposes stated above. Beyond this British centers vary greatly in their function. Many emphasize inservice training; others are devoted to curriculum development and dissemination. Multipurpose centers exist to serve both curriculum development and the inservice needs of elementary and secondary teachers in a specific region, but special subject centers also exist to carry out the functions of inservice education and curriculum development for subjects such as English, math, science, reading and many others. It would seem, therefore, that the British have developed a standard model for teacher centers only to the extent that they are in agreement that the local teacher center should be managed and directed by practicing teachers and that professors of education should be kept at arms length.

The overall lack of standardization found in British centers seems to be a characteristic which they share in common with our own centers. In the United States some centers are run cooperatively by school districts and teacher education programs at universities while others are field based extentions of university programs. Some centers are even run by school districts on their own. Whatever their purpose, however, these centers are rarely run by classroom teachers themselves and are usually intended to meet the specific needs of whatever agency funded them.

The Teacher Centers Program of the Education Amendments of 1976 attempts to rectify this by defining for the first time a set of purposes

which could be standard for all teacher centers funded under its provisions. Section 532 of Public Law 94-482 states:

> For the purpose of this section, the term "teacher center" means any site operated by a local educational agency (or combination of such agencies) which serve teachers, from public and non public schools of a state, or an area or community within a state, in which teachers, with the assistance of such consultants and experts as may be necessary, may
>
> (A) develop and produce curricula designed to meet the educational needs of the persons in the community area, or state being served, including the use of educational research findings or new or improved methods, practices, and techniques in the development of such curricula...
>
> (B) provide training to improve the skills of teachers to enable such teachers to meet the special educational needs of persons such teachers serve better, and to familiarize such teachers with developments in curriculum development and educational research including the manner in which the research can be used to improve their teaching skills.[5]

In 1967 the British Schools Council issued a similar fiat in an attempt to articulate a set of standards by which all British teacher centers could be modeled. Eleven years later the British have learned much about how this mandate has been put into practice and these realities should be given close scrutiny before too many American centers are funded under the stipulations of the standards set forth in Section 532 of Public Law 94-482. The following is a summary of what we typically believe to be true about teacher centers in the United Kingdom and some of my own general observations about what exists in reality:

1. Teacher Centers are locally run by practicing teachers. Classroom teachers do, in fact, conduct a great deal of inservice training but so do local "wardens" (teacher center directors), members of the administrative staff, and in some areas even university faculty participate. The nature of the training can range from one day workshops to courses which continue for weeks. Topics are often responsive to local needs and focus on such issues

as bilingual and multiethnic education, reading instruction, media development and teaching methods. Courses offered with equal regularity, however, are "Typing for Teachers," "First Aide for Teachers," guitar, photography, pottery making, and cinema study. These latter offerings generate great interest and provide necessary social interaction, but their effect in developing the teaching skills of teachers is somewhat less obvious than those which carry that intention in their title.

There is little question that all British teacher centers are responsive to the needs of the schools in a given district. Most wardens take great care to canvess the opinions of the classroom teachers who work in the schools under their jurisdiction. Teachers also serve on the teacher center advisory boards and are vocal participants in planning and evaluation. The actual administration of the center, however, is determined by the administrative style of the warden and by the dictates of the local education authority. Many centers never grow beyond the "tips for teachers" brand of course while others develop an identify of their own as their role becomes clearer and teachers begin to see them as a real means for helping solve educational problems.

Generally, teacher centers in the United Kingdom which have been successful have depended less on the initiative of local teachers than they have upon a number of other factors. Most successful centers are:

1. Tied to a national curriculum project which gives them a clear mission and helps establish credibility with local teachers.

2. Provided with strong leadership from a forceful warden.

3. Given active support from their local education agency or a university.

In sum, British teacher centers are responsive to the needs of local

schools and solicit the support of teachers in those schools. However, they are not unlike their American cousins in that they are still tied to a large administrative bureaucracy which can, and often does, impose its wishes on local initiative.

2. Teacher Centers in Britain are voluntary and teachers attend in droves.

The single most publicized characteristic of British teacher centers is the voluntary nature of teacher participation. There is a strong likelihood that the incentive for teachers to visit centers is motivated by a strong personal desire to improve themselves professionally, but evidence to the contrary becomes more abundant as researchers dig deeper into the British centers.

In a November, 1976 Phi Delta Kappan article, Arline Julius points out several reasons why teachers attend center courses:

> There are a variety of reasons for seeking inservice training in Britain. Teachers interested in professional advancement can record their attendance at center courses to enhance their resumes. Teachers are aware that an advisor may notice them at center sessions and that this can influence promotion. Also, a head or advisor can subtly pressure a teacher to attend courses when they are given on school time. Released time can be another incentive...Since travel and residential cost are funded by the Local Education Authority, a teacher may want a weekend with paid living expenses.
>
> British teachers, like teachers everywhere, are attracted by rewards---promotion and/or salary increments.[6]

The voluntary nature of British teacher centers also presents the problem of capturing the sustaining teacher interest over the long term. Teachers are encouraged to attend center courses through various public relations and communication devices such as newsletters, invitations extended to individual teachers, and exhibitions of materials which wardens and their staffs display in schools which are within their area of responsibility.

Much of this activity serves the function of surveying teacher interest and as well as developing interest in new programs. But sustaining teacher interest in center courses remains one of the most pressing problems in British teacher centers, especially with experienced teachers. Marilyn Hapgood reports:

> Few leaders in teacher education I talked with in England could see great gains from centers. One serious problem in both England and the United States concerns the apathetic teacher who is no more involved in self-directed learning in teacher centers than he/she is involved in any other educational innovation.
>
> Sybil Marshall expressed the general view of English teacher education most concisely: 'The teacher centers have made things better for the better teachers. It takes a long steady pressure to make teachers change- the teacher centers only just break the surface.'[7]

Supporters of teacher centers who respond to such criticism point out that much of the apathy in teachers is a result of their lack of involvement in self-directed learning and a lack of responsibility for decision making. They point out that where teachers are given the opportunity to play an active role in identifying their own needs, a process of self-renewal is initiated and teachers become willing participants in center activities. Colin Richards, however, takes a different view:

> ...in general teachers have not gone far with defining new objectives of their own, devising their own experimental procedures or developing their own minicurricula.
>
> Basically...Working Paper No. 10 (the British version of P.L. 94-482) underestimates the complexities of local curriculum development, especially the definition of objectives and the procedures for evaluation. A lot of good teaching...is largely "intuitive." Teasing out the underlying rationale of good practice, formulating it for others to try out, and then evaluating it in a wider setting are very difficult procedures. calling for much expert help and entailing for more time and effort than the vast majority of teachers can reasonably expend.[8]

Richards' cynicism is derived largely from the recognition that the majority of teachers have little time for the discussion of new methods

and objectives. To the interested but already overburdened classroom teacher, curriculum work in a teacher center simply becomes another burden to shoulder. Few teachers look forward to the complicated and tedious process of curriculum evaluation and instructional revision without additional pay or at least a prestigious title. Furthermore, professional training, especially curriculum development, is not yet fully recognized as part of every teacher's responsibility, neither in England nor the United States. In Britain many wardens still look at curriculum decisions as their private domain and few teachers have enough energy left after a full day of teaching to participate fully in this process. As a result, many curriculum decisions are left to the local head and to his staff. This hardly seems different from curriculum development staffs in this country. The total apparent difference is that curriculum development in a British teacher center is tailored more to the needs of a specific locale than to an entire school system.

One final point remains to be made regarding the voluntary participation of teachers in British centers. Participation for elementary teachers seems to be considerably higher than for secondary teachers. Several factors might explain this:

1. For secondary teachers, the teacher center lacks credibility as a place where a teacher can increase his/her knowledge base. In the United Kingdom most secondary teachers still look to the university for development of further expertise in the content areas.

2. By their nature, secondary schools have a wide variety of resources from which to draw, therefore have little need to draw upon the resources of the teacher center.

3. Large secondary schools do a great deal of curriculum development within their various departments. They have little need to look outside for help. Also, large secondary schools provide many opportunities for the social interaction and intellectual discourse provided by many teacher centers.

Placing the responsibility for inservice education in the hands of practicing professionals seems like a worthy if not a necessary goal if educators hope to solve the real problems facing our schools. However, it is not surprising that few teacher centers either here or in Britain have developed from teacher initiative alone. Classroom teaching is demanding both physically and intellectually. Teacher rarely have the time or energy to contribute large portions of their work day to developing and implementing inservice training or to engage in voluntary curriculum development without strong incentives. In addition, teachers are already overburdened with large classes, mainstreaming, demand from the public for increased achievement, new educational programs and mary other problems.

Findings in a recent survey of over 1,200 classroom teachers in South Dakota support this notion. Betz, Jensen and Sigormi found that teachers least preferred methods of inservice training that required them to assume major responsibility for the inservice activity and were most enthusiastic about training that provided for teacher involvement, but in a somewhat passive role. Teachers were also somewhat less enthusiastic about work groups resulting in the development of curriculum or instructional materials and assistance from other teachers in their classrooms. The survey also found that the types of inservice activities viewed as being most useful were workshops on a college or university campus, special college courses conducted at the local school by college or university staff and observation

of teachers in other school system. Least useful activities were local faculty meetings planned by administration, one-hour to full-day programs conducted by outside consultants, and workshops held during the school year for intensive study of local school problems.[9]

Two additional points stand out about the nature of teacher centers in the United Kingdom:

1. Teacher participation in center activities in Britain depends largely on the amount of influence and direction given by the Local Education Authority (LEA). This direction ranges from leaving total organization to teachers to a strict control by the LEA. Rigid control usually implies a certain degree of complusion to teachers and breeds a reluctance (and even and unwillingness) to attend center programs. Conversely, too much freedom given to teachers often results in a certain degree of wallowing about without clear purpose or structure. Unfortuately, most teachers are not trained to manage their reeducation. They must be allowed a certain degree of experimentation so that they can find their own level of self-renewal.

2. Inservice education in Britain places great emphasis on solving problems which are common to all teachers. Workshop leaders direct their efforts at leading teachers through experiences which give them both the knowledge and skills necessary to solve real classroom problems on their own. Center workshops are seldom opportunities for individuals to deliver lectures like junior-sized professors. This is too often the case in many inservice programs I have witnessed in the United States. Classroom teachers given an opportunity to teach their peers often attempt an impersonation of one of their favorite college mentors but fail because they lack the credibiltty of an advanced degree or experience. Needless to say, the result is usually disasterous. Implementing inservice education with practicing teachers

requires training and prudent selection of the teachers who will be charged with the responsibility. The transition of classroom teachers of children into teachers of teachers is not always a smooth one.

Simply put, the teacher centers program articulated in P.L. 94-482 represents an effort to bring a common purpose and structure to teacher centers in America in the same way that the Schools Council Working Paper No. 10 did in the United Kingdom eleven years ago. Those attempting to establish teacher centers or to redesign an existing one to conform to the provisions of this new law might do well to take note of the lessons to be learned from British efforts. The creation of centers where teachers can arrange their own training to meet their own needs is a highly desirable goal which has achieved considerable success in Britain; it has also had its shortcomings. Whether we can overcome these shortcomings or emulate the British success is highly dependent upon the degree to which we understand both the similarities and differences in British and American concepts of teacher centers and strive to take them into account.

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